##### *"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"*

**The Silk Road: Linking Europe and Asia Through Trade**

The Silk Road was not actually a road. It was not paved. It was not even a single route.  The Silk Road was a name given to any route that led across China to Rome. It was a 4,000-7,000 mile trip. It spanned though China, Central Asia, Northern India, and the Parthian and Roman Empires. It connected the Yellow River Valley to the Mediterranean Sea and passed through places such as Chinese cities Kansu and Sinkiang and present-day countries Iran, Iraq and Syria. Each place had something the other wanted. Rome had gold, silver and precious gems. China had silk and spices and ivory. The purpose of the route was for Chinese to trade silk for medicines, perfumes, and slaves in addition to precious stones. The Silk Road is the most well known trading route of ancient Chinese civilization. It is the story of one of the world's oldest and most historically important trade routes and it had great influences on the culture of China, Central Asia and the West. Ideas also traveled along the Silk Road, ideas that affected everyone.

The Romans were not surprised to find another civilization hidden over the mountains. They had been looking for “the Silk People” for a long time. They discovered pieces of silk from the people they conquered. Silk quickly became popular in Rome. But the Romans did not know who was making this wonderful material. The people they conquered did not know who was making silk either. They simply traded for it. The Romans sent out people to find the makers, but they never could never find them. Most never returned.

When the Eagle (sign of Rome) finally met the Dragon (sign of China), you can imagine how excited they were. The rewards were great, but the dangers were many.

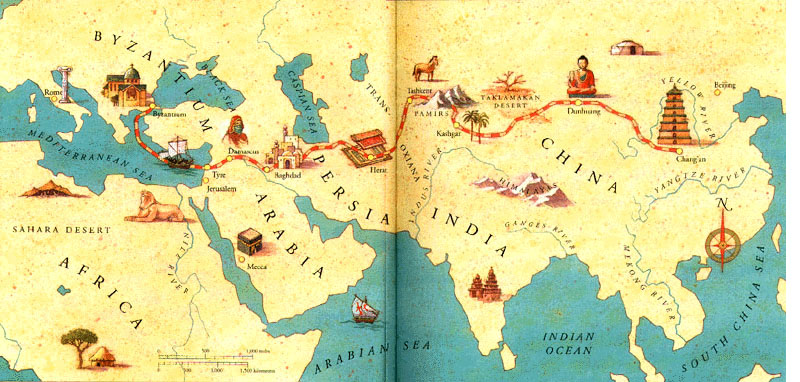
It was incredibly dangerous to travel along the Silk Road. You faced desolate white-hot sand dunes in the desert, forbidding mountains, brutal winds, and poisonous snakes.  There was one nice section, called the Gansu Corridor, a relatively fertile strip that ran along the base of one of the mountains. But, to reach this strip, you had to cross the desert or the mountains. And of course, there were always bandits and pirates.

Very few traders made the whole trip. They worked in relays. Each trader would go a certain distance, exchange their goods for other goods, and hopefully return. The next would move along the road, trade, and hopefully return.

There were three main routes, and all were dangerous.

* Northern Route – Westward to Black Sea
* Central Route – Westward to Persia, Mediterranean Sea, Rome
* Southern Route – Westward to Iran, India

Over the centuries, the Silk Road developed a civilization of its own. Where possible, the Silk Road became lined with huge temples and booming cities. But there were still vast stretches of deserts and mountains to cross, with no city or water in sight. It was never easy to travel the Silk Road. As overland trade became increasingly dangerous, and overseas trade became more popular, trade along the Silk Road declined.



*"When a man is riding through this desert by night and for some reason -falling asleep or anything else -he gets separated from his companions and wants to rejoin them, he hears spirit voices talking to him as if they were his companions, sometimes even calling him by name. Often these voices lure him away from the path and he never finds it again, and many travelers have got lost and died because of this. Sometimes in the night travelers hear a noise like the clatter of a great company of riders away from the road; if they believe that these are some of their own company and head for the noise, they find themselves in deep trouble when daylight comes and they realize their mistake. There were some who, in crossing the desert, have been a host of men coming towards them and, suspecting that they were robbers, returning, they have gone hopelessly astray....Even by daylight men hear these spirit voices, and often you fancy you are listening to the strains of many instruments, especially drums, and the clash of arms. For this reason bands of travelers make a point of keeping very close together. Before they go to sleep they set up a sign pointing in the direction in which they have to travel, and round the necks of all their beasts they fasten little bells, so that by listening to the sound they may prevent them from straying off the path.”*

---- Marco Polo, *Travels*

**Marco Polo**

**"I did not tell half of what I saw"**

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| http://www.kyrene.org/schools/brisas/sunda/great/polo.jpg |

Marco Polo is one of the most famous Westerner travelers on the Silk Road. He excelled all the other travelers in his determination, his writing, and his influence. His journey through Asia lasted 24 years. He reached further than any of the other explorers. He traveled the whole of China and returned to tell the tale.

Marco Polo came into the world in 1254. His father, the explorer Nicolo Polo, and his uncle had left to set out eastward on their first trip to China before Marco was even born. Marco lived in a city called Venice. It wasn't the best place for growing up. By the time Marco's father returned, Marco was 17 years old! When his father decided to go on another exploration, he agreed to take Marco with him. A few years later Marco Polo, his father, and uncle embarked on the most courageous journey to Cathay. On their trip they visited many places. Marco Polo discovered eye glasses, ice-cream, spaghetti, and the riches of Asia! When he returned, no one believed his stories of the riches he found in Asia. Marco Polo showed them some of the riches he had brought home. That made Marco Polo famous. When Marco was near death, a priest came in his room to ask him if he'd like to admit that his stories were false. Instead, Marco said, "I did not tell half of what I saw". Those were his last words.

Marco Polo was a great explorer. He was very brave. Marco was not scared at all when they left to go on the trip. He was also very determined. When people would not believe his stories of his discoveries, he was determined to make them believe him. Marco Polo was very courageous too. He wasn't scared of the people in the different countries he visited.

**Directions: Read TB page 102-104. Complete the following questions by using the TB as well as this reading packet. Make sure that you answer the questions in complete sentences and rephrase the questions in the answers.**

1. Explain what the Silk Road is. Is it a road?
2. Why didn’t the Romans know where the silk came from and who made the silk?
3. How did the Silk Road help different lands learn more about each other?
4. Name two goods that traveled along the Silk Road.
5. Explain why the silk route was so dangerous.
6. What effect did Marco Polo’s journey have on people of Asia and Europe.
7. What kinds of things did Marco Polo see on his adventure? Why didn’t people believe what saw?
8. Why was Marco Polo a great explorer?
9. What were the goals of Zheng He’s journeys?
10. Compare the journey of Marco Polo with the journey of Zheng He. How were they similar? How were they different?